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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE
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OCTOBER 16. 1781.

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A
S E R M O N.

M A T H. xiii. 45. 46.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls: who when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

WHAT shall we do to be saved? is the most important of all enquiries, in the judgment of those who have a just concern about their souls, and are accustomed to look beyond this life. That we might not be destitute of proper information, in a matter of such unspeakable moment, God hath been pleased to afford us the revelation of the gospel, which our Saviour very commonly

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ly calls "The kingdom of heaven." This revelation is a blessing of great value, and they who understand it best will prize it most highly; for "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

But how melancholy is it to observe, that while Christians agree in making everlasting happiness their great object in religion, they often differ so widely in their sentiments concerning the road that leads to it; one saying, This is the way; and another, That is the way; and every one is positive that he is in the right. Though they all profess to admire and reverence the precious discoveries of the gospel, yet their views of these discoveries are very various, and sometimes opposite and contradictory. How are these differences to be accounted for?—They are owing probably to some defect in the search. Men either refuse to undergo the pain and labour that are necessary to find out the truth; or having taken up some counterfeit

counterfeit which has accidentally come in their way, and for which they have contracted a fondness, they would fain persuade themselves that they have found it already. Thus many of the professed votaries of truth, contented with a superficial or partial examination, remain in ignorance, and, deceiving themselves and others by appearances, run into endless opinions and conceits in religion.

Now, in opposition to the too common practice of mankind, our Saviour intimates in the text, that in order to know the truth in what concerns our chief good, we must be at pains duly to enquire after it. The most valuable treasure hid in a field, can never enrich any one while he does not search for it: and he who will not seek for pearls, has little chance of finding them. In like manner, proficiency in spiritual knowledge is not to be attained by a wish, or by a very slight application, any more than in other sciences: For though the truths of religion are not so obscure, but they may be understood by every one who will make a right use of the means of instruction; yet neither are they so ob-

vious and palpable, as to cut off all possibility of error and mistake ; nor do they carry with them such lustre and irresistible conviction, as to force themselves upon those who are not disposed to attend to them. In short, we must search for truth in order to find it ; and, in proportion as it appears, yield to its evidence, at the expence of all the favourite notions and fancies we may have formerly entertained. We must be willing to sell all that we have in order to purchase it. Whatever, therefore, may contribute to direct and assist us in our inquiries after truth, especially in studying the mysteries of Christ's kingdom, demands the attention of all who are concerned for their own salvation, or that of others. To distinguish truth from falsehood, and certainty from opinion ; to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to clear off what is childish and fanciful from what is useful and solid, is of importance on every subject, but most of all in religion ; because the most pernicious and fatal errors are those which affect the everlasting interests of mankind.

My design then, at this time, is to take notice

tice of some of those qualifications that are necessary rightly to understand, and duly to prize, the great truths of salvation. And this, I hope, will not be thought a discourse from the purpose of our present meeting. One principal end of our office, is to instruct mankind in those divine truths that are indispensable for their conversion, reformation, and improvement in holiness. But if we ourselves labour under ignorance, or prejudice, or mistake in these important matters, how shall we communicate right apprehensions to others?—And how shall we get rid of our ignorance or error, but by using the means appointed for this end?

I proceed then, with the help of God, to offer to your consideration the following particulars: That, in order rightly to understand, and duly to prize the great truths of salvation, we must cultivate an intimate acquaintance with the holy scriptures.—In matters that are obscure or dubious, we must put ourselves to the trouble of an attentive and patient examination.—We must proceed with caution and diffidence—with modesty and humility.—We must

must make due acknowledgments to the Author of every good and perfect gift, and habitually look to him for his illumination and direction.—And, all along, study a conformity of heart and life to the laws of the gospel. However unnecessary such observations may be to those who have already examined things to the bottom, and are grounded and settled in the faith; yet, I flatter myself, they may be of some use to such as are only entering upon the serious study of religion, or who have not sufficiently tried all things, in order to hold to that which is best. Though the road is well known, and may appear plain and beaten to the old experienced traveller, a few simple directions may not be altogether unprofitable to those who have newly set out upon it, or who have not made such long journies in the paths of wisdom.

In the FIRST place, then, I observe, That, in order rightly to understand the great truths of religion, and to perceive their value and importance, it is necessary that we cultivate an intimate acquaintance with the holy scriptures, which we all acknowledge

knowledge to be the rule of faith and practice, and the standard by which religious opinions are to be estimated. I do not mean such a philological acquaintance as enables a man to be a profound critic, however useful this may be for the teachers of religion : Much less do I mean, that pragmatistical captious knowledge of scripture, which only furnishes matter for religious contention and doubtful disputation ; but that reverend and thankful study of God's word which engages the heart, which proceeds from an honest desire to know the will of God, and to grow daily wiser and better.

Religion was not designed merely to gratify mens curiosity, or to exercise their wit and dexterity ; but to refine their sentiments, and change their hearts and tempers, to exalt their affections, and make them “ partakers of a divine nature ; to “ turn them from darkness to light, and “ from the power of Satan unto God.” And, for these excellent purposes, the scriptures every where hold forth to us the grandest and most interesting objects that can be presented to the mind of man :
Such

Such as the venerable perfections of the great God ; his universal government over the natural and moral world ; the plan of his adorable providence in what is past, and what is to come ; the corruption and misery of mankind, and the wonders of our redemption by Jesus Christ ; the deformity and dreadful consequences of vice, and the beauty and advantage of holiness ; the importance of our behaviour in this state of discipline ; the appearance of the whole human race before the tribunal of the Son of God, to receive according to their deeds ; the solemn transactions of the last judgment, and the final consummation of all things.

These are matters which evidently call for the attention of every reasonable man ; and all the objects and pursuits of this life, about which men are commonly busied, when put in balance with them, must appear to be lighter than nothing, and vanity. And they are exhibited to us, at the same time, with such majesty and simplicity, that they may be understood and felt by every one of ordinary capacity, who duly attends to them ; for
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the scriptures are addressed to the bulk of mankind, and not to those only of uncommon parts, or deep erudition.

What unspeakable benefit may, by the blessing of God, be derived from the study of his holy word, when we make the interesting objects which are there so fully displayed, the chief subject of our devout and habitual contemplation? What a powerful tendency has this to enlarge the mind, to elevate the soul above the meaner things of the world, and to inspire it with just and noble sentiments! Such divine efficacy may appear mysterious to those who are strangers to religion; and it may not be fully comprehended by many Christians, who are more taken up about the improvement of their heads than their hearts: But to its reality the Psalmist, under the Old Testament dispensation, could bear witness: "O how love
 " I thy law! it is my meditation all the
 " day. I have more understanding than
 " all my teachers; For thy testimonies are
 " my meditation. The law of the Lord is
 " perfect, converting the soul. The com-
 " mandment of the Lord is pure, en-
 B "lightening

“lightening the eyes. The entrance of
 “thy word giveth light; it giveth under-
 “standing to the simple.” And this is a
 reality known to all who are devoted to
 God, and unfeignedly aspire to be truly
 wise. They see the truths of religion in
 a very different light from the speculative
 inquirer; and they have a sense of their
 value and importance, with which many
 nominal Christians, and perhaps some
 learned divines, are, in a great measure,
 unacquainted.

How indispensable then is it, that the
 teachers of mankind make the holy scrip-
 tures their principal study? For how can
 men acquire saving knowledge themselves,
 or be profitable to others, who, neglecting
 this fountain of heavenly wisdom, drink
 only from the contaminated streams of
 human doctrine? or who, though they
 read the word of God, have their atten-
 tion employed chiefly upon obscure and
 dubious points, or things hard to be un-
 derstood, while the plain momentous
 truths of religion are little regarded?
 These great truths are the first principles,
 or elements, in Christianity, which, when
 thoroughly

thoroughly understood, and habitually attended to, will be of infinite advantage in all our future enquiries. They will be a safe-guard against needless controversies, and prepare the mind for passing a right and sound judgment in every matter that requires deliberation.

The doctrines contained in scripture are not all equally clear and obvious in themselves; and it sometimes happens, that the declarations in one part of this sacred book appear inconsistent with those we meet with in another: And these apparent inconsistencies have been a principal source of controversy and division in the church. Some mysteries in religion, as well as in nature, are, and perhaps ever will be above the comprehension of man in his present state. But as wise men, by a proper use of their faculties, have obviated and explained several phenomena in nature, which before were considered as unaccountable; so, by a proper use of our faculties in religion, we may be able to discover the truth, in points which, at first sight, appear unintelligible or contradictory: Or, at least, we may free them

from that artificial obscurity in which they have been involved by men, who, from prejudice, from narrow views, or perverse dispositions, have endeavoured to reduce and accommodate every thing to their own favourite systems. Therefore, I observe,

SECONDLY, That, in order to guard against error, in matters about which Christians are divided, we must put ourselves to the trouble of an attentive and patient examination. That painful exertion and perseverance of thought, which, in difficult cases, the discovery of truth requires, is far from being an acceptable task to the bulk of mankind. It is inconsistent with the natural levity, the itch for novelty, and the love of variety, which are the prevailing dispositions of many. They rather chuse to run eagerly from one subject to another, in quest of something curious and entertaining, than to dwell, for a sufficient time, upon what is solid and edifying; like the Athenians, mentioned in the 17th of the Acts, who “ spent their
“ time in nothing else, but either to tell
“ or

“ or to hear some new thing.” And this turn of mind, when indulged in religion, naturally begets a luxurious vitiated taste for new and strange doctrines, similar to what people contract for meats and drinks, which is as pernicious to the mind as the other is to the body. “ They are ever “ learning,” as the Apostle says, “ and never come to the knowledge of the truth.” That indolence of disposition likewise, that aversion from serious reflection, which is the temper of many, makes them take up their opinions upon trust ; or, at least, content themselves with a very short and superficial enquiry. Now, the scripture tells us, that this is not the way to become wise. We are called upon to exert those faculties which God hath bestowed upon us, and to persevere in the study of wisdom, if we would reasonably hope to obtain it. “ If thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, “ and apply thine heart to understanding ; “ yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and “ liftest up thy voice for understanding ; “ if thou seekest her as silver, and search- “ est for her as for hid treasures : Then “ shalt

“ shalt thou understand the fear of the
“ Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

THIRDLY, In our enquiries after divine truth, it is fit that we proceed with caution and diffidence. Indeed, there are many fundamental truths in religion and morality so plain and indubitable, that to feel their force requires only attention ; and to pretend hesitation or difficulty about them, discovers a distempered judgment, or a bad heart, or both. But, in other matters, it is requisite to distinguish with care and exactness, what is evident and certain, from those things that are only doubtful or probable. Presumption and probability ought to have all the regard paid them to which they are entitled ; but full assent or acquiescence is due only in those cases where the evidence is complete. It would be very absurd and wicked for one to shut his eyes at noon-day, and call in question the light of the sun, or the reality of those objects that are immediately before his face ; but it would be no less foolish, rashly and positively to determine what is going on in the moon
and

and the planets. Though an affectation of scepticism, therefore, in plain cases, is extremely ridiculous ; yet, to suspend the judgment in matters that are really obscure, and demand a deliberate and impartial discussion, becomes a wise man. As, on the one hand, we should be so tenacious of those realities that are manifest and incontestable, as to allow no objections or difficulties that may come in our way to stagger our faith in them ; so, on the other hand, we ought not hastily to reject any thing that has the appearance of truth or probability, without a fair trial.

Rashness, or precipitancy of judgment, is but too natural to mankind, and is attended with many bad effects : For one false principle, adopted without examination, or taken for granted at the beginning, is enough to put a man wrong in the whole progress of his after reasoning, and at length to confirm him in dangerous absurdity. Hence many serious well-meaning Christians, by taking for certain what is, at best, dubious and disputable, have hurried away themselves and others from the great concerns of salvation, and
spent

spent their strength in controversies very foreign from the essentials of religion ; and, by their intemperate zeal for lesser matters, or for their own favourite conceits, have given occasion to the adversaries of religion to deceive themselves with the imagination, that they combat religion itself, while they only fight with the shadow of it ; and that they are disproving the doctrines of Christianity, while they only ridicule the inventions and fancies of men.

It is observed by a pious writer, that when the devil cannot make men irreligious or profane, he exerts all his skill to thrust out the great matters of religion, and to ingross their attention with points that are circumstantial and of small moment. And he has too often prevailed upon them to waste their time and talents upon what the Apostle calls “ vain janglings, and doating about questions which engender strife, and not godly edifying.” When he is disappointed or limited in pushing on the ungodly to persecute and torment the friends of Christianity, he is generally too successful in
kindling

kindling dissention amongst themselves, and stirring them up to hate and to devour one another. Hence that variety of extravagant opinions, which appear like meteors, and catch the attention of the vulgar for a time: Hence those numerous sects and parties who multiply doctrines, and heap up to themselves teachers according to their different humours: Hence all that load of precious baubles, “wood, hay, and stubble,” that has been built upon the foundation of the gospel; and which, in the view of infidels, has contributed so much to the disgrace of Christianity, and the reproach of its professors.

What need, then, have we to be upon our guard against departing from the simplicity of the gospel, or rashly admitting the imaginations of men, even of eminent and pious men, as the will of God? It is much easier to embrace errors than to quit them; for they gather strength secretly and insensibly, and fester in the mind, and sometimes take such fast hold of the man, as to baffle the plainest and strongest evidence.

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FOURTHLY,

FOURTHLY, In the study of religious truth, it is indispensable, that we be possessed of an humble docile disposition. Humility shews itself in a becoming sense of our own manifold imperfections ; in having the mind open to conviction, and ready to lay aside those errors which, through prejudice or passion, we may have entertained ; and in our charity for the mistakes and different sentiments of other people. This disposition every sober Christian will find himself concerned to cultivate with peculiar care, when he considers what stress is laid upon it by our blessed Lord and Master : “ Verily, verily, “ I say unto you, except ye receive the “ kingdom of Heaven as a little child, ye “ shall in no wise enter into it.” — “ If any “ man among you,” says the Apostle, “ seemeth to be wise in this world, let him “ become a fool, that he may be wise : “ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” It is no wonder we should be so often, and so earnestly, exhorted to humility, when we consider the woful influence that pride has upon the minds of men. It puffs them up with the
vain

vain conceit of their having made wonderful progress in religion, when they have not bestowed time and attention sufficient to understand the first principles of it; and of their being adepts in spiritual knowledge, while they have scarce got over the threshold of wisdom. Pride shuts the mind against conviction, and makes men adhere obstinately to the greatest absurdities. It cherishes contempt and hatred for those who differ from them; it envenoms their discourse, and poisons even their prayers; and, while they will allow no good qualities in their adversaries, they have an unbounded indulgence to grant for the most unchristian tempers in their disciples and followers:—And, what is worst of all, they sometimes provoke God to give them up to a spirit of delusion, by which they wander farther and farther in the mazes of error and folly; so that, “having eyes they see not, “and hearts, but do not understand.”—“For the Lord,” saith the prophet Isaiah, “hath poured out upon you the spirit of “deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: “the prophets and your rulers, the seers

“ hath he covered. And the vision of all
 “ is become unto you as the words of a
 “ book that is sealed, which men deliver
 “ to one that is learned, saying, Read this,
 “ I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for
 “ it is sealed. And the book is delivered
 “ to him that is unlearned, saying, Read
 “ this;—and he saith, I am not learned.”
 We ought to dread this spiritual desertion
 as the greatest of evils. “ The Lord know-
 “ eth the proud afar off; but he giveth
 “ grace to the humble.”—“ To whom shall
 “ he teach knowledge? and whom shall
 “ he make to understand doctrine? Them
 “ that are weaned from the milk, and
 “ drawn from the breasts.”

FIFTHLY, In order to have a sound understanding in divine matters, let us make due acknowledgments to the author of every good and perfect gift, and habitually look to him for his illumination and direction. They who neglect to pay homage to God may soon become wise in their own conceit; and, perhaps, they may be admired, for their parts and dexterity, by men like themselves; but they will remain
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at a great distance from true wisdom. Solomon was endued with a very extraordinary share of natural sagacity and acuteness : How far did he, in this respect, excel all the people of his day, and all the sceptics likewise, and professed philosophers of our times? But Solomon had more penetration than to ascribe his superior knowledge to himself. " The Lord giveth " wisdom," says he : " Out of his mouth " cometh knowledge and understanding." And the nearer always that men approach to the perfection of wisdom, the more sensible they will be of the necessity of divine direction.

People accustomed to serious thought can tell how different their views and impressions are of the same things at different times : That, on some occasions, truth darts unexpectedly upon their minds, and shines, so to speak, with a lustre and force which they are incapable of commanding at pleasure ; and what is this ultimately to be ascribed to but the agency of Heaven? Those who value themselves on accounting for every thing from natural causes, may attribute this to a particular habit

habit of body, or to the state of the blood and animal spirits, the different changes in which have a corresponding influence upon the imagination, and other faculties of the soul ; and so far they may be right. But who is the author of our constitution ? Who directs and regulates these different habits of body ?—if it is consistent with sound philosophy to ascribe a favourable season and a plentiful increase, a prosperous voyage, or a fortunate adventure, to the good providence of God ; why not those favourable dispositions of soul which admit the light of divine truth with peculiar energy and brightness, and captivate the heart with the beauties of holiness ? It is surely as worthy of God to govern the moral world as the natural ; and why should we be ashamed or afraid to acknowledge him in the one more than in the other ?

Indeed, the better we are acquainted with ourselves, the more we shall be disposed to have recourse to God for his grace, to preserve us from error and folly, and to guide us in the path of truth : For, when we seriously ponder the prejudices of education,

cation, the force of habit, the bias of passion, the influence of established opinions and established names, together with the plausible and deceitful forms which false and delusive doctrines sometimes put on, what man in his senses would chuse to trust to himself, when he may have superior wisdom to direct him? "Open thou mine eyes," says the Psalmist, "that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; so shall I talk of thy wonderful works." And with what gratitude will every considerate person lay hold of that encouragement, published by the Apostle? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" *.

SIXTHLY,

* The gross stupidity, superstition, and abominable wickedness of the heathen world appear astonishing, when it is considered that they had the common light of reason and conscience to direct them. But is it not wonderful also, to observe the folly and obstinacy of those who refuse to be instructed by the gospel revelation; or who having, by the help of this revelation, patched up a system of natural religion, suitable to their own taste, make no other use of all
their

SIXTHLY, Let me observe, in the *last* place, That nothing will contribute more to our improvement in the knowledge of divine truth than a conformity of heart and

their borrowed light and knowledge, than to confirm themselves and others in infidelity ?

Many proficients in the sciences, and in every human accomplishment ; many who are deservedly reckoned judicious, quick-sighted, and rational, in other matters, discover a strange backwardness and slowness of heart with regard to the great doctrines of Christianity, which are so admirably suited to the nature and condition of man. They appear abundantly candid and upright, and impartial in all the affairs of common life ; but, in judging of religion, they betray a subtle, disingenuous, sophistical spirit. While, without hesitation, they give ample credit to the facts and events of ancient times, they would fain withhold their belief from those of the gospel-history, which are no less credible and well attested : And how greedily do they lay hold of objections against religion, which would be deemed altogether frivolous and futile upon any other subject ! While they admire the beauties of eloquence and fine writing, and are enraptured with the simple, the natural, and the sublime, in ancient and modern productions, the beautiful simplicity, strength, and majesty of the holy scriptures pass unobserved. What genius and learning are displayed in some fine-spun theories and Utopian systems of society and government, where religion is no part of the plan, where the Supreme Ruler is wholly overlooked, and his providence, his approbation or displeasure, are not considered as having any hand in the affairs of men. And in those histories of nations and empires,

and life to the laws of the gospel. Blessed be God, there has been little controversy about the practice of religion, or the conversation that becomes the disciples of Christ. For the virtues of a good life do commend

empires, compiled by some of the most fashionable modern writers, where religion is necessarily interwoven, and must often be introduced, does it not as often seem the author's principal object, if not to turn it into ridicule, at least, to shew his own infidelity, and total disregard of every sacred institution? Do not they who pique themselves most on freedom of thought and liberality of sentiment, frame a character of the Sovereign of the universe, which, for indolent indifference about his subjects, for good-natured lenity and weak indulgence, any prince or subordinate ruler upon earth might justly be ashamed of? And is not their favourite account of the plan of his administration, as altogether kind and benevolent, and solely intended to communicate happiness, flatly-contradicted by daily experience of the manifold sufferings and calamities that abound in the world?

These inconsistencies may be owing to early prejudice; to the depravity of mens hearts, and their strong attachment to the ways of folly and unrighteousness; to the pride of science or an affectation of thinking far above people of plain understanding; or to the torrent of fashionable impiety, by which the thoughtless and the half-thinking are implicitly carried along. But, whatever may be the cause, does not this natural aversion from the truth sufficiently shew the necessity of supernatural illumination in divine things; and what need many, who are generally accounted wise and deep-sighted, often have to be enlightened from above in the first

commend themselves directly to the heart and conscience; and however they have sometimes been regarded in theory, yet, in fact, they always have been, and always will be, good and acceptable, as well as profitable to men. And what a beneficial influence the practice of virtue has upon the faculties of the mind, the scriptures do not fail to inform us: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: A good understanding have all they who do his commandments." — "I have more understanding than the ancients;" and how? "because I keep thy precepts." Thus the knowledge and practice of religion mutually assist and cherish each other; and the head and the heart improve together.

On the other hand, the Apostle says, that "the natural man receiveth not the

principles and plainest truths of religion? For the most learned and renowned unbelievers are, with regard to their irreligious tenets and philosophical refinements, every whit as blind and bigotted, and as thorough proof against all reasonable ordinary means of conviction, as those whom they hold in the lowest contempt for fanaticism, superstition, and credulity.

"things

“ things of the Spirit of God ; for they
 “ are foolishness to him : neither can he
 “ know them, because they are spiritually
 “ discerned.” As pride and self-conceit
 carry men on from one pernicious error
 to another, “ deceiving, and being decei-
 “ ved ;” so the free indulgence of our
 depraved affections and irregular passions
 tends to pervert the judgment, to obscure
 and vitiate the intellectual sight ; “ and, if
 “ the light that is in thee be darkness, how
 “ great is that darkness !” Sensuality stu-
 pifies the mind, and surrounds it with a
 thick mist, which the rays of divine wis-
 dom do not penetrate. An inordinate at-
 tachment to the riches and cares of this
 world debases the soul ; it magnifies trifles,
 and diminishes the grandest objects ; and
 “ chokes the good seed of the word, so
 “ that it becometh unfruitful :” For how
 can he, whose heart is nailed to this earth,
 or locked up in his coffers, exert that en-
 largement of thought, and dignity of sen-
 timent, that are necessary to comprehend
 or relish the things that be of God ? Selfish-
 ness, malice, and envy, are very favour-
 able for the production of “ confusion,
 “ and every evil work ;” but where these

weeds are cherished or neglected, they will effectually obstruct the growth of that
 “ heavenly wisdom, which is pure, and
 “ peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreat-
 “ ed, full of mercy and good fruits.”

Men enslaved to their passions have often good natural parts, and do acquire much human knowledge and learning. They may also, as the Apostle observes, receive occasionally such transient glimpses of divine truth, as a person has of his
 “ natural face in a glass, and straightway
 “ forget what manner of persons they
 “ were. But whoso looketh into the per-
 “ fect law of liberty, and continueth there-
 “ in, he being not a forgetful hearer, but
 “ a doer of the work, this man shall be
 “ blessed in his deed.” In proportion as we cultivate the Christian graces, we shall advance in sound and useful wisdom; for the Spirit of God delights to dwell in the soul when it is thus duly prepared and sanctified. And it is not to be supposed that God will suffer those who love the truth, and are unfeignedly devoted to his fear, to be fatally deceived by false appearances, or to persist in any dangerous or destructive error.

Thus

Thus I have endeavoured to lay before you such qualifications as I judge to be essential for conveying to the mind a clear apprehension and deep impression of the great truths of salvation. And, from all that has been said, you may see at what a price this heavenly wisdom is to be had: And is it any wonder? The thing itself is precious: And what thing that is commonly accounted precious amongst men is to be obtained without labour, and pains, and expence? Were it to be had for nothing, or come in our way upon every occasion, this might rather be a presumption against its value. But, though the search is attended with trouble, the acquisition of this pearl of great price will make ample amends: For, be assured, if you are once possessed of it, you will think nothing so excellent and desirable. With what cheerfulness will you give up all your former mistakes and darling conceits, to make way for this rich and genuine treasure! You will think it no hardship to sell all that you have to purchase it: And though the whole world were put in your offer, as a bribe to part with it, you would look upon it as a poor temptation. Can

we

we then be at too much pains to seek for what is so transcendently valuable and advantageous?

But it may be asked, What becomes of the bulk of mankind, who are not trained and formed for study, who have little leisure or opportunity for those attentive and tedious enquiries which, in many points, are necessary to form a right judgment; and who, of consequence, must be often greatly at a loss to distinguish truth from falsehood? To be sure, they labour under manifest disadvantages; and if they are misled and bewildered, wo to those who mislead them. At the same time, it must be allowed, that even the generality of Christians, who earn their bread by the sweat of their face, are far from being destitute of opportunities, or of spare time, to examine matters of genuine importance, and to become wise to salvation, were they disposed rightly to improve them. Not to speak of the Sabbath-day, which is principally set apart for religious worship and instruction, and without encroaching on the space that is taken up in necessary relaxation and amusement, how many hours do even the busy part of mankind

mankind spend in hearing and telling idle news, in evil-speaking, or in officiously interesting themselves in other mens matters, which might be occupied in sober enquiry and useful conversation? The time that serious Christians often throw away in forming conjectures upon obscure passages of scripture, or in vain controversies about needless questions, or things that far exceed the reach of human understanding, might, if properly managed, contribute much to their advancement in true wisdom. And, alas! Do not many take more pains to sour their tempers, to rankle and embitter their spirits by fierce religious contentions, than might be sufficient, under God, to adorn and enrich their souls with the graces of the Spirit, and from in them the same mind that was in Jesus?

After all, it is much to be doubted whether even the vulgar are so generally destitute of true wisdom, as one, from their circumstances, would be ready to imagine. Blessed be God, there are not wanting among us numbers of plain honest Christians, and humble enquirers, who are animated with unfeigned piety

to God, and good-will to men, who profit daily by reading, meditation, and prayer, and are, in reality, taught of God, though they cannot speak to very good purpose about religion. Though such persons are commonly overlooked amidst the crowd, and make no noise among the wranglers and disputers of this world, they are taken notice of by him who dwells with the humble and contrite, who giveth counsel and sound wisdom to those who are willing to receive instruction, and refuse it not.

But whatever allowance is to be made for those whose circumstances incapacitate them for deep reflection, surely no excuse is to be admitted for the indolence of such as have abundance of time and leisure, and whose business it is to devote themselves much to study and meditation. Let me, therefore, conclude this discourse with recommending to you, my brethren, and to myself, to make the important matters of salvation our chief and habitual study, and to use all the helps of nature and grace for advancing more and more in this holy science: And the juster notions we have of religion ourselves, the fitter

fitter we shall be for giving instruction to others, and for detecting the specious appearances which error and folly often assume. But for "vain jangling about the commandments of men, and profane and old-wives fables, these let us shun, because they will increase unto more ungodliness."

As for you, the hearers of the gospel, whose lawful occupations do not permit you much leisure for intricate enquiries, and who may not be well qualified to unravel the objections and quirks of vain reasoners; the best advice I can give you is, to hold fast to the plain capital truths of religion: And beware of being diverted from them by things which you do not understand, or questions which you cannot solve. You may be reproached with ignorance, and puzzled with difficulties; but remember always the words of your Saviour, which will never deceive you: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And he that keepeth his commandments,

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"dwelleth

“ dwelleth in him, and he in him: And
 “ hereby we know that he abideth in us,
 “ by the Spirit which he hath given us.”
 Let others be amused with vain conceits,
 and vex themselves and their neighbours
 with endless disputations, and be carried
 about with every wind of doctrine. Be
 ye thankful to God, who hath given us
 eternal life, through the knowledge of
 himself, and Jesus Christ whom he hath
 sent: And let it be your constant care to
 walk worthy of your high calling, and
 to abound more and more in the work of
 the Lord. While vain-glorious professors
 make their boast of their own inventions
 and singularities, it will be wisest and
 safest for you to join the Apostle in the
 subject of his humble triumph: “ God
 “ forbid that I should glory, save in the
 “ cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom
 “ the world is crucified unto me, and I
 “ unto the world. And as many as walk
 “ according to this rule, peace be on
 “ them, and mercy, and upon the Israel
 “ of God.”

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THE END.

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